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SUBJECT: KENYA: DADAAB REFUGEE CAMP CONDITIONS

Summary

11. (U) Regional Refugee Coordinator (Refcoord) Inga Heemink and Refugee Program Officer Matt Austin visited Dadaab Refugee Camp in Kenya January 19-26 to review current conditions at the camp, discuss ongoing negotiations for additional land allocation, and monitor PRM-funded projects. Despite the closure of the Kenya/Somali border, more than 62,000 refugees sought shelter in the three Dadaab camps in 2008. As of January 31, the camps have now reached a total population of more than 248,000, an increase of more than 45% since January 2008. In January 2009, new Somali arrivals exceeded 8,200, reversing the downward trend of new arrivals from a peak of 7,500 in August 2009. The last plot of land in Dadaab was issued on 22 August 2008; since then, new arrivals must find space with family or clan members already in the camps. The influx of new arrivals has severely taxed the water system, and the congested conditions threaten health and stability within the camp.

Registration

12. (U) With the hiring of additional staff, UNHCR reduced the registration backlog from four months to less than a week. Previously, new arrivals were wrist-banded and registered based on the serial number on the wrist-band but this operation has now stopped. Registration currently only occurs at Dagahaley camp and UNHCR has the capacity to register 500 individuals/day. Fingerprinting of all residents of Dagahaley camp has also been completed, and UNHCR hopes to do the same for Hagadera and Ifo in 2009 if supplemental funds become available.

Protection Issues and Security

13. (U) UNHCR and the NGOs operating in Dadaab all report increased levels of violence in the three camps. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), who established community peace committees for community policing, receives daily compilations of all the security incidents. According to LWF, the top three most common security incidents include 1) armed individuals within the camp, 2) fighting over land, and 3) fighting over water. On January 17, a 10-hour mini riot occurred over water when one borehole broke down for a few hours in Hagadera. While UNHCR pays the salary of 117 police officers in Dadaab town, all but approximately 45 have been diverted to Mandera to deal with the security situation there. This leaves only one police officer for around 5,500 refugees if they are all on duty at the same time. UNHCR and NGOs also report active recruitment by Al-Shabab and militia groups of the out-of-school youth and young men; however, the extent of this recruitment cannot be confirmed.

14. (U) Due to the overcrowded conditions, the transit centers located in each camp no longer serve as reception sites for new arrivals but rather have been converted into safe havens for high-profile cases and other vulnerable populations. At the time of the PRM visit, the transit center in Hagadera housed some high-ranking TFG officials, including a Brigadier-General, ethnic minorities who have been targeted in the camps, domestic abuse

survivors, and those threatened by their community for marrying outside their clan or ethnic group.

15. (U) There is also concern of refolement of asylum seekers at the border. While the Liboi transit center is currently closed, LWF retains a clerk there to serve as listening post to advise LWF of daily estimates of new arrivals and arrests by the local police. When notified of these arrests by LWF, UNHCR tracks down the individuals in question to ensure that legitimate asylum seekers are not refoled and are instead transferred to Dadaab. While this system generally works, an incident occurred during the PRM visit when a vehicle carrying Somali asylum seekers refused to stop for the police. The police opened fire and three were injured and transferred to Dadaab. Several days later, the three asylum seekers were forcibly returned to Somalia even though UNHCR had requested that they be turned over to the Kenyan Department of Refugee Affairs and UNHCR.

----- Health Activities -----

16. (U) On the first of January, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) took over healthcare operations from GTZ in Hagadera camp (GTZ remains the implementing partner for healthcare in Ifo and Dagahaley camps). The priorities for IRC during this initial stage include properly equipping the laboratory (as GTZ unexpectedly removed all equipment except for one microscope), ensuring a consistent quality of care, and increasing the capacity of the local staff. IRC has noted an increase in the number of malnourished children, especially with the new arrivals. The stabilization ward for severely malnourished children usually averages 10 patients but now houses around 20 patients.

17. (U) The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) also operates in Hagadera and hopes to implement a febrile surveillance system in Dadaab in 2009. CDC plans to share laboratory space with IRC in the Hagadera health center and provide additional equipment and personnel for blood culture analysis. Through its current surveillance activities, CDC has identified seven cases of multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR TB). CDC expressed great concern about these cases due to the high cost of treatment (over \$20,000/case in Kenya), continued transmission in the camps from yet-to-be identified cases, and the negative impact a high MDR TB rate might have on the refugee resettlement program.

----- Water -----

18. (U) Along with land, water is a major limiting factor for population growth in the Dadaab Camps. The NGO CARE is responsible for providing refugees water at international standards for quality and quantity. Despite running boreholes at maximum capacity, Refcoord and PRM Program Officer found that the most congested tap stands in the most congested camp only provide 7 liters per person per day, well below the UNHCR standard of 20 liters. Concerns have also been raised by CDC and UNHCR based on independent testing of water quality which found certain tap stands to lack adequate chlorine levels. Deficiencies in the quantity and quality of water raise serious concerns over hygiene and sanitation in the camp and the spread of contagious disease. Tension over user rights at tap stands has already led to violence, including a riot that put several refugees in the hospital. PRM was pleased to learn that ECHO is close to funding CARE for a large scale water system improvement project, to include replacing leaking pipes, which will solve 60% of the quantity problem. Dovetailing with the ECHO project, PRM has increased funding to make improvements in water quality, including a more rigorous testing regimen.

----- Land Allocation -----

19. (U) The three camps of the Dadaab complex have become extremely congested due to the large influx of refugees from Somalia in 2008. On August 22, LWF assigned the last plot of land for shelter construction. Since then, all new arrivals have been forced to find shelter within existing compounds inhabited by kin or clansmen, taxing sanitation, water, and hygiene systems beyond acceptable international standards. Dadaab now accommodates almost 250,000

refugees, well beyond its originally designed capacity of 90,000. The congestion has increased tensions between long-stayers and newly arrived refugees and between the host population and residents of the camp. Encroachment by refugees onto local land and into empty land left for firebreaks is becoming common.

¶10. (U) UNHCR has been conducting negotiations for additional allocations of land to expand the Dadaab camps since March 2008 with little success. That this expansion would be the first under the 2006 Refugee Act has made for a confused process. Negotiations have been complicated by disorganization among the competing Kenyan stakeholders, including the local constituencies and MPs, the Provincial Commissioner, and central government ministries. A promise from the MP of the Lagadera Constituency to allow expansion of the Dagahaley Camp in return for UNHCR-funded development activities in the local community has not been honored. Months of fruitless UNHCR requests to the Ministry of Immigration, the Commissioner for Refugees, and the Hagadera and Fafi Constituencies finally led the UNHCR representative to agree to an ill-conceived transfer of 50,000 refugees to Kakuma Refugee Camp, an offer that has since been rescinded by UNHCR headquarters in Geneva.

¶11. (U) Donor and UNHCR headquarters reaction to the transfer plan, estimated to cost between \$10 and \$15 million without any concessions from the Kenyan government for new land, led UNHCR to reexamine its options and send the UNHCR Deputy High Commissioner (DHC), Craig Johnstone, to Kenya. The DHC, in meetings with the Kenyan Prime Minister, agreed to a comprehensive package that would include 2000 hectares for a new camp in Dadaab, a transfer of an unspecified number of refugees to Kakuma, and addressing the development needs of the host community. However, to date, the local constituencies have not agreed to the deal, as required under the Refugee Act for the land allocation to go forward.

COMMENT

¶12. The current conditions in Dadaab are untenable and will inevitably lead to disease outbreaks and increased violence in the camps. While the transfer of some refugees to Kakuma might be a good symbolic gesture, the only viable solution to the problem is quick approval for the allocation of new land. The international community must continue to pressure the GOK for a quick resolution.

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